

SATURDAY, JANUARY 22, 1870.

Subject: The Victorious Power of Faith.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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THE SUBJECTS OF VOL. III. THUS FAR PUBLISHED ARE

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THE VICTORIOUS POWER OF FAITH.

"And the apostles said unto the Lord, increase our faith."—LUKE XVII. 5.

If you read the context, the whole passage seems, together with the answer of the Master, to be obscure. He had been saying, "It were better" for a man "that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." It was after this discourse that "the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." He replied, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye might say unto this sycamine-tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you."

It does not seem as if he encouraged them. It does not seem as if he granted their request, or told them how they could improve. He seems, rather, to have rebuked them, by calling to mind how little faith they had, which they themselves knew, as was shown by their making application to him for more. Why they should have asked for faith in connection with the peculiar subject of forgiveness, or in connection with the subject of carrying one's self so as not to voluntarily injure one of God's little ones, by way of anger, or by way of implacableness, seems at first obscure; but it will become plain if you will take the interior line or clue of the connection, and not the exterior.

Our Saviour was wont so to time, and to word, and to illustrate his instructions, that they struck the inward moral sense of his hearers. He was preaching to his disciples the duty of overcoming passions and malignant dispositions. He was preaching to them the result of the doctrine of forgiveness and gentleness.

There was a certain moral sense in the disciples, as there is in all men, before which this injunction of the Saviour came with approbation. They felt that he taught them the right thing. And yet, the moment they undertook to think about it, as a principal thing in themselves, they began to say, "How can we forgive?" They thought of this one, and that one, and the other one; they recalled all their little

animosities, and prejudices, and dislikes; and, though they were on the point of saying to themselves, "Well, I will obey," the thing itself seemed so impossible that their courage sank down, and they said inwardly, "We cannot do it." And they turned instinctively to the Master, and said, "Increase our power of doing this"; that is, "Increase our faith"—by which is here to be understood that whole spiritual and eminent realm of power out of which comes the potency by which we change our nature, as we shall by-and-by see.

Equally strange seems the answer: "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye might say unto this sycamine-tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you." In answering this request; in dealing with the state of mind out of which this special request grew—namely, moral despondency; the want of courage to undertake what was required—Christ said, "I command you to forgive utterly and continuously; and do you say, 'I never can do it; it is impossible for me to do it?'" And do you ask me to increase your faith? I tell you, there is not only power in you to do it, but there is in you a power so great that you can make a total change." Or, in other words, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard-seed—if you had the least particle of faith—you could do a thing that seems as impossible as to command that sycamine-tree to be rooted up and cast into the sea."

This was figurative language; and it was very powerful, being built upon the oriental imagination. Men at that time were more accustomed to such things than we are.

We have an analagous instance recorded in the ninth chapter of Mark. Our Saviour had just come down from the mount of transfiguration to the noisy, bustling world, that must have seemed to him serene and bright up there a few moments before; as a man comes out of his closet where he has had communion with God and heaven, and has experienced the very sweetness and joy of Christian hope, and steps forth into the world again, and comes in contact with its rude scenes and brute force. Our Saviour, having just come down from the mountain, found the great throng raging beneath, under the dominion of the passions.

"One of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him; and he foameth and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away; and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out, and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation! how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him; and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed, foaming. And Jesus asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftimes it hath cast him into the fire and into the waters, to destroy him; but if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the

father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

It is just the same thing, precisely. Here is what Christ was asked to do—a great mercy; and he says, "This is possible if you only have faith enough." And the father said, "I have a little; but, Oh! give me enough more to make up what I lack." It is the heart's outcry. This case is more touching, but it is strictly analagous or parallel to that of the text, where the disciples were commanded to overcome these selfish and defective instincts. They saw that it was beautiful and right, and wanted to do it, but fell off before it, and said, "How can we?" and besought the Lord to *increase their faith*. And he said to them, "It is possible. It does not require so much faith as you think. Why, if you only had it to the amount of a grain of mustard-seed, there is such power in it that you could do not only that, but more difficult things." That is the spirit of the reply.

Men are just like the disciples. They hear religion preached; they believe the things that are said; and at times the truth glances through the exterior coating and strikes their moral sense. The ideal of the truth presented to them seems beautiful and sweet. In a white light it is to them. Thousands and thousands of men there are who hear the gospel preached every Sunday, and think there is nothing more beautiful than meekness, nothing more beautiful than humility, as they are presented to them. These are excellent qualities in their estimation. They believe in love. They believe in everything that is required in a true Christian character. It meets their approval. Their reason approves it. Their judgment approves it. Their taste approves it. Their moral sentiments approve it. And yet, when they ask themselves, "How shall I practice it?" they fall off instantly, and say, "It is not possible for me. I never can do it in the world."

Take gentleness. Here is a great rude-footed, coarse-handed man, gruff and impetuous, and careless of everybody, who sits and hears a discourse on the duty of being gentle; and as the various figures and illustrations are presented, he says, "Oh, how beautiful it is to be gentle!" But the moment he gets out of the church, he thinks, "The idea of my being gentle! I gentle? *I* gentle? Somebody else must do that part of religion. I never can. It is not my nature to be gentle."

Men have an ideal of what is right; and they believe in the possibility of its realization somewhere; but they do not think they are called to that thing. They do not believe it is possible for them.

There are avaricious men, I suppose, to whom, on hearing a discourse on benevolence in a church, it really shines, and who say, "Oh, this benevolence, though it is well nigh impossible—how beautiful it is!" But when it begins to come home to them, and the question is,

"Will you, from this time forth, order your life according to the law of benevolence?" they fall off from that, and say, "I cannot; it is impossible." And if Christ were present, and such men were under the influence of his teaching, they would turn to Him and say, "Lord, if this is true, it is true, and I must conform to it; but you must increase my faith. I must have some higher power. I cannot do it without." And Christ would encourage them, and say (not rebukingly, as it seems in the letter, but very comfortingly), "Do not think it is so hard. It is difficult, but not so difficult as you suppose. Do not think it to be so impossible that I must work a miracle for you before you can accomplish it." If you have faith, if you rouse up those spiritual elements that are in you, if you bring them under the illumination of God's own soul, and they are inspired by the divine influence, there is that power in you by which you can subdue all your lower nature, and can gain victories over every single appetite and passion, and every single evil inclination and bad habit. Let the better nature in man once come into communion with God, and it is mightier than the worse nature in man, and can subdue it.

You will fail of the secret and real spirit of this passage, if you do not consider its meaning as not only an interpretation, but as an interpretation which is designed to give courage and hope and cheer to those who desire to break away from bad tendencies and traits, and to rise, by a true growth, into the higher forms of Christian experience.

Let us consider, then, the practical aspect of this matter. When a strong nature is snatched from worldliness, and begins to live a Christian life, what are the elements of his experience, reduced to some sort of philosophical expression?

First, the soul is brought into the conscious presence, and under the recognized power, of the divine nature. This is with more or less distinctness in different individuals.

Consider how men are brought to a religious life. One man has been a very worldly and careless man, until, in the universal whirl of affairs, a slap of bankruptcy, like the stroke of waves against the side of a ship, smashes into his concerns, and he founders. He saves himself, but all his property goes to the bottom. And there he is, humbled, crushed, mortified. And it is a very solemn thing to him. But he never had any preaching before that gave him such a sense of the unsatisfactoriness of this life. He never before got a realizing sense of what a poor place the world was. He thought, "Let us build"—three tabernacles? Yes, "three hundred tabernacles. This is the place for me." I have heard men say, "This world is good enough for me; I do not want any better world"—till they came into great struggles and straits. Then they began to think that the world was not enough.

And if such men have had the advantage of Christian instruction, you will frequently see them, without ostentation, slide into the church. They have not had a very strong experience; but they say, "I have been living wrong, I have been living for wrong objects, and I am going to live a religious life." They do not know exactly what that means; but they disappear from the world, as it were, and reappear in the church, and begin to live a better life—though they have not found out all the meaning of it.

Another man was living very prosperously and happily. The fountain of his joy was in his companion; and God took her; and he knew no other way of joy. He settled himself to life and to business, and said, "I can open no new fountain." And the world was companionless and solitary to his inward nature. Outwardly it was companionable enough; but for his own peculiar personal self, that had lived and fed upon angel's food, nothing remained when the angel left. And he said to himself, "If there is anything in religion, now is the time for me to try it." And so that man entered upon a religious life.

Another man had no companion, but he had a little child. He had lived an unhappy life in his household; and by-and-by Death, which is the great divorcee, and has a right to divorce, took away his companion and his trouble, but left a dear child, into which he poured the whole of his heart and nature. That little girl was everything to him. She was his morning star—for he waked to think of her before any other one, and to frolic with her, and chat and prattle with her. And his last thought, as he left the house, was of her. And now and then she gleamed into his thoughts all day long in his business. And when the evening came, she was his bright evening star. And when he went home at night, and she greeted him at the door, he caught her in his arms, and inwardly thanked God.

She sickened; and he said to God, "Kill me, but spare the child!" And God took the child. And he said, "I have nothing left." He lay before God as the flax lies before the flail, and said, "Strike! strike! I am dead. I am cut up from the roots. Strike!" He would have died if he could, but he could not. Nobody can die that wants to. It is folks who want to live that die, apparently. And finding that he could not die, by-and-by he got up and crept into life again, and said, "What do I care whether I make or lose?" He had no longer any motive for laying up property. And so he said, "If there is anything in religion, I am going to try to get it. I shall die if I do not have something." And he gets religion to fill the great void and vacuum in his soul.

Others come into a religious life by the power of sympathy. They are drawn toward it by personal influence. They go into it because

their companions are going in. In a hundred such ways as these God's providence brings people into the beginnings of a Christian life. But when a man has once come into it, his very first experience, usually, whether he be exactly conscious of it or not, is the thought that he is brought into the presence of a higher Being—a higher Spirit—than he has been wont to think was near him. *God* begins to mean something to him. He may not know the divine attributes; he may not know the theological lore in respect to the Deity; but he begins to have through the day a certain impression of God present with him. And it is a real operative impression.

This sense of God's presence is that which is the beginning of faith in him. It opens the door for the divine power to inflame his soul; that is, for the divine mind to give strength and inspiration to the nobler and higher part of his mind—to his reason; to his whole moral nature; to that which is the best and highest in him. And no matter what may be the door of experience through which he came into the church, no matter what sort of an experience he had before he became a Christian, if he be true to himself. If when he has begun a Christian life he keeps the upper part of his nature (his reason, and his moral sentiments) open, so that God's light shines down into him, then he has the beginnings of a divinely inspired faith; that is to say, the recognition of great truths and forces that are supersensuous, and that lie in the direction of invisible and higher forms of truth.

By the enlarging, by the education, by the inspiration of a man's nature, in this direction, the beginnings of victory are planted. And now, all the forces of a man's nature, and all the foregoing habits of his life, beginning here, will soon be so changed as to come into agreement with his higher feelings, which will be excited by the inshining of God's soul.

Men think it is mysterious; but it is not mysterious. I can give you an analogue that will show it to you precisely—only the truth is far greater, far richer, far more glorious and minute, than the illustration.

Take a person of some degree of sensibility—a young woman, for instance—who has been living in a vicious circle of people. Her father and mother—emigrants—died on landing. She was of good stock, and had strong moral instincts; but she was a vagrant child, and was soon swept into the swirl of poverty and vice. Although too young to become herself vicious, yet she learned to lie, and steal, and swear—with a certain inward compunction—until by-and-by some kind nature brought her out of the street, and out of the den, and into the asylum. And then, speedily, some childless Christian woman, wanting to adopt a child, sees her, and likes her face and make, and brings her home to

her house. This is almost the first time she has had any direct commerce with real truth and real refinement; and at first she has an impulse of gratitude, and admiration, and wonder; and in the main she is inspired by a sense of gladness and of thankfulness to her benefactress. But as she lives from day to day, she does not get over all her bad tendencies. Because she has come to live with and to be the daughter of this woman, she does not get over the love of lying, and tricks, and dirtiness, and meanness, and littleness. The evil does not die in an instant from her nature. Yet there is the beginning of that in her which will by-and-by overcome it. There is in her a vague, uninterpreted sense of something higher and better than she has known before. And it is all embodied in her benefactress. She hears her sing, and hears her talk, and sees what kindnesses she does to others, and how she denies herself. And this child, that has never been taught to do anything except from a selfish motive, that has lived where men were like so many animals, clawing and pawing for themselves, sees that there is such a thing as kindness on principle, and kindness that is done at the expense of one's own wishes. The inference of these things works more and more on the better part of her nature; and she begins to take hold of herself, and to wrestle with her own bad tendencies. And if she be, as I have supposed her to be, a child of strong original moral nature, she will, in the course of a year, be almost free from the taint of corruption; almost free from deceits; almost free from vices. And it will be the expulsive power of new love in her soul that will have driven out all this vermin brood of passions. As long as she is in the presence of this benefactress, she will feel streaming in upon her nature those influences which wake up her higher faculties, and give them power over her lower faculties.

When men are brought into the Christian life, and they begin to come into communion with God, the higher part of their nature receives such a stimulus that it has power to dominate the lower part—to control pride; to hold in restraint deceits; to make men gentle, and mild, and sweet, and forgiving, and noble, and ennobling. The direct influence which the spirit of God has upon the human soul, is to develop the good and expel the evil tendencies that are in it.

There will, then, follow from this beginning of a divine life in the soul, the suppression of many deeds; the modification of bad habits; the restraint of inclinations respecting the relations and interests and uses of different parts of the mind. There are too many of them to mention now. They are innumerable, as it were.

There will be a change in our outward conformities to society; to institutions; to new duties. There will be the acceptance of standards of morality which before we have not accepted. There will be the lay-

ing aside of this and that sin which were before recognized as sins, but were yet permitted.

But important as these things are, they are but auxiliaries. There is this one work which the new life begins to accomplish—namely, the readjustment of the forces of the soul. It changes the emphasis. It changes the point of power. It determines whether the soul shall, with all its forces, work downward toward the selfish and sensuous, or whether by the force* that there is in the lower nature, it shall work upward toward the spiritual and the love element—toward purity and duty.

For, the entrance of God's spirit into the soul, the *regenerating process*, as it is called, the beginning of a new life, does not destroy nor eradicate any constitutional element. When the doctor says, "You have been all running down, but I will take you in hand and restore you; I will renovate you and make you just as good as new; you will be a new man when you have gone through the course that I shall prescribe for you," he does not mean that you will have any other legs and hands, or any other organs. He simply means that they will be so repaired and regulated that it will be as if they were new. And when it is said that a man shall be a *new creature*, it is not meant that literally there will be any added faculties in him, or that there will be any old faculties taken out of him. He was made right to begin with. The mischief is not in our creation, but in the use which we put ourselves to. We use ourselves badly. And when we enter upon a Christian life, it is a life which teaches us to use every faculty in ourselves as God meant that it should be used. There will be no change of any constituent element in us. Characters will change. The power will be transferred from the bottom to the top. All the passions of our animal and secular nature will be brought into the service of love, and purity and truth.

But, as no abstract statement ever amounts to as much as a concrete example, consider some cases which we have in the Bible. Take Peter, for instance. What a stalwart, impetuous man he was! Bold, rash, headlong, and changeable, was he. It seems at first as though a man who is bold should not be changeable; but it is very often the case that he is. At any rate, it was so with Peter. And how, when you come to trace his life later on, the power of grace had cured all the unfavorable tendencies of his nature, without taking away his impetuosity, or his courage! How his nature had been regulated, so that he is said to have been in his later days one of the noblest of the apostles!

Even more familiarly, we know the process in the case of John. He was one of those irritable men that you see sometimes—men that are not boisterous; that are very serene, very tranquil, apparently, but that, when you know them more intimately, you find, and are surprised

to find, are as quick as gunpowder, and go off with a flash. They are irritable, although there is this exterior softness. John was the one that disputed as to which should be first. He was ambitious. He was the one that, when they were going into a village, was angry at the villagers because they did not do obeisance to the Master, and prayed that fire might be brought down from heaven to consume them—a mode of controversy which has been a favorite one ever since. It settles an antagonist very quick to *burn him up!* Although John originally had this irritableness, he afterwards became the world's ideal of gentleness, and sweetness, and love. What a transformation that was, from the angry burning John, of the earlier period of his life, to that inspired John, of which the world has never heard enough, and is likely to never tire of hearing.

The life of Paul was still more open before us. He was naturally a leader—and as much so after his conversion as before. He was one of those men that go ahead, not because they are ambitious, but because they cannot help themselves, any more than cork or wood can help coming to the surface of water. Some men lead because they are made to lead, preëminently. And Paul was such a man. He was a man of immense conscience, immense pride, and immense combativeness. He was converted. His conscience did not diminish; his pride did not shrink; his combativeness did not flow out. All those great elements remained in him. Before he was converted, his conscience worked with the malign feelings. Afterwards, his conscience worked with the benevolent feelings. Before he was converted, his pride worked for selfishness. After he was converted his pride worked for benevolence. Before he was converted, his combativeness worked for cruelty. After he was converted, it worked for zeal.

Look at his own description of himself. He says, in Acts, the twentieth chapter, beginning with the ninth verse,

"I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did."

I will warrant it. He never thought he ought to do a thing that he did not try to do it.

"And many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."

Such was Paul before he was converted, according to his own description of himself. Now hear Paul give an account of himself afterwards, when he told what he did as a Christian, as contained in the second chapter of 1st Thessalonians, beginning with the seventh verse:

"We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children; so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember,

brethren, our labor and travail; for the laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God, also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe; as ye know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God."

Now, in both cases he was doing the same thing. When he went to Damascus, he was attempting to promote religion. He was putting down the disciples of Christ in order to make them conform to what he believed to be God's service. And afterwards, when he espoused the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ, and worked to build it up, he had precisely the same end in view. But now he was working with the other end of his mind. At first it was pride and conscience acting with the malign feelings. Afterwards, it was pride and conscience acting with the benign feelings. And his earlier self and his later self were perfectly antagonistic. His unconverted nature was antithetical to his converted nature. The spirit of love developed itself into ascendancy; but conscience was strong as ever. It was then justice and truth, whereas, before, it had been error and cruelty; and honor and equity never had a more noble exponent than Paul after his conversion. All his life he was using precisely the same faculties; but in one case he used them in direction of love, and in the other case he used them in the direction of self.

Paul was so proud, in the early period of his life that it was dangerous for one to oppose him. Afterwards he was just as proud; but now his pride was self-respect. It was a pride directed and leavened by love; it was a pride working for love, as well as in the spirit of love. There is not in literature another instance of such superlative egotism, such superb egotism, such acceptable egotism, as there is in Paul's writings. He never sees a person, or meets an experience, or thinks a thought, that he does not tell you how he felt about it. It is "I," and "I," and "I," right straight through from beginning to end. That which made him so despotic and intolerent before his conversion, and afterwards so sympathetic and gentle, was his intense *I-ness*. And when he identified himself with the truth of God, he, as it were, took the whole of it into his personality. So that the same pride which characterized him before his conversion characterized him afterwards. It was not destroyed when his nature was changed. The difference was that in one case it worked malignly, and in the other benignly.

When, therefore, a man enters into a Christian life, not only does he come into communion with God, but his nature is newly directed. He begins to make the upper, the truly spiritual, the love-bearing elements in him dominate over the others. No man can change his faculties, any more than he can change his bodily organization; and yet, his disposition may be changed! Every single wrong element in a

man may be subdued ; but it requires that he should be in earnest, and use the right influences. There is not one single sin that a man cannot break away from. There is not one single evil habit that a man cannot correct. There is not one single perversion of a man's nature that he cannot rectify. There is not one tendency of selfishness, of passion, of lust, or of avarice, that cannot be overcome.

It is not necessary that a man should go into church to be just a little better. There is that in every man which, if he will only let God quicken it—if he will only let God shed the vivifying influence of his Spirit upon it—is competent to give him complete possession of himself in righteousness. It may be very hard for a lazy man to become active ; but he can do it. It may be very hard for a proud man to become humble ; but he can do it. It may be very hard for a selfish man to become truly benevolent ; but he can do it. It may be very hard for a sly man to become open and frank ; but he can do it. It may be very hard for an insincere man, full of appearances and specious conduct, to become sincere and straight forward ; but he can do it. It may be very hard for a man who is critical, sharp, and uncharitable, and lances his neighbor's faults while he spares his own, to become as considerate of others' feelings and reputation as of his own ; but he can do it. You can do anything. There is nothing that is wrong in the human soul that cannot be put right. And you have the power to put it right, provided you are clothed with the Spirit from above ; provided you take into your hands the implements that come from the armory of God. There is power in the Lord Jesus Christ for a perfect victory over the flesh, the appetites and the passions, and to bring you into the supremest triumph of the spiritual life.

Let no man, then, coddle his faults, and say, "I was made as I am, and it is not possible for me to be an eminent Christian. That is another question—how far it is possible for you to be an *eminent* Christian, in the sense of experiencing original thoughts and feelings, and bearing into the world a new tide of ideas ; but in so far as the rectification of your own nature is concerned, God has given you power to govern yourself. There is no man who wants to do it enough to say, "Lord, increase my faith," that cannot do it. There are a great many that will not do it if they do not ask, and do not want to ; but there are a great many men who will make shipwreck of their souls because they were never morally incited to look toward better things. They go into a sort of calculation with themselves, as to how far away from old sins it is necessary for a soul to go, just to be saved, and how near to them one can go and yet be saved. They do not want to make a total renunciation. There are a thousand fibres yet that hold them to the world.

Consider, here, how strong that figure of our Saviour's is. I suppose most of you have never taken up a tree. If you have, and it was of any size, you know that a tree, which looks as though it were one stem growing out of the ground, is found to have, the moment you undertake to transplant it, five hundred stems under ground. Here is one great root, that you never knew anything about, by which it anchors itself; and there is another there; and there is another yonder. You take off the ground and cut away this root, and then shake the tree, and it stands just as though nothing had been done. You remove the earth and cut off that long anchor-root; and then you say, "Now it will come." No, it will not come. You dig again—a little impatient—with pick and spade, and you find that here is another root, and there is another root; and as you cut them off you say to yourself, "Will it *never* come up?" And you pull at it again. No, it will not come. And you get quite vexed, and you have an opportunity to get good-natured again; for it does not come. By and by you say, "Well, I will see what is the matter"; and with the pick you strike under, and under, and under, until all at once, *thump*, you hit a great tap-root. That sheds new light on the subject. Here are all these surface roots that you have uncovered and cut; and finding that then the tree will not budge, you dig far under, and to your surprise find this tap-root; and with one powerful, sidelong blow you cut that off, and the tree falls over, and the victory is gained!

Now, that is very much like transplanting a man. There are ever so many roots that hold him down. All the surface is full of them. They run great distances in every direction, dividing, bifurcating, twisting under stones, and around all sorts of obstructions. And when all these surface roots have been cut he is not half ready to transplant. You must dig under and under, till you come to the tap-root, that was far out of sight, and that nobody suspected, and cut that; and then you can transplant the man.

The Lord says, "If you have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, you can say to this sycamine-tree, Be thou plucked up by the roots, and cast into the sea." Hard as it is to transplant the tree of your soul, difficult as it is to sever the roots that hold it down, the Master says, "There is power to do it." However many faults you may have, that branch their roots out in every direction, and difficult as it is to transplant them by the ordinary instrumentalities; nevertheless, faith in the soul will give you power to pluck them up by the roots, and cast them from you, or transplant them to better soil, where they will grow to a better purpose.

And no man who is entering the precincts of a higher life; no man who is drawing near to the twilight of his true manhood; no man who

begins to know that he is a son of God, and begins to hear voices whose meaning he can scarcely discern, and begins to recognize the call of God, and to respond to that call by beginning to live in obedience to his higher instead of his lower nature—no such man ought to say, “I can be a Christian a little way.” My brother, you can be a Christian *all* the way. There is nothing in you that, if you have started on the Christian course, is so bad that you cannot overcome it by the grace of God. It is your privilege to receive power from on high that shall give your will such firmness, and your judgment such directness, and your moral feelings such predominance, that you shall be able to overcome any passion or appetite. Whatever may be your sin, whatever may be your lust, whatever may be your vice, it is in your power to correct it. No man should in a cowardly way enter upon a Christian life, saying, “I can do some things, and I can live better than I have been living.” You can live *victoriously*. God gives you the power—and he will refresh and invigorate that power in every man’s soul—to overcome every snare, every delusion, every passion and appetite, everything that is wrong in you, and to become perfectly victorious.

I preach, not simply a free gospel, but a *victorious* gospel. I preach a gospel that has been full of victories and noble achievements, but that has not yet begun to show what its full power and what all its fruits of victory are to be. No one, then, who has been trying to overcome his faults, need despair.

I have a door with a patent lock, which was designed to keep burglars out, and which I know will, because it keeps the owner out a good deal of the time! I go and put in the key, and push, and wait for the bolt to fly back with a click—for only when that is heard is it worth while to attempt to open the door; but it does not come. The door now and then has the sulks; and I have sometimes stood, and stood, and stood, working at that lock. There was no help for it. It was a choice between staying out and opening that door. I have had to try perhaps twenty times before I could just exactly hit that little slide inside. And I have taken hold of the handle, and pushed, and pushed, and pushed, and said, “I am bound to get in; I *must* get in; I *will* get in.” And after infinite attempts, at last I hear the welcome click. If I had given up after a few trials, I might have found my lodging where I could; but I said to the door, “You have got to come open: you *shall* come open;” and I did get it open, and got in.

Did you ever lose the key to a trunk or drawer, and go round and borrow keys of your friends to open it with? And have you failed to find one that would unlock it? And have you said, “I *must* get it open. My money is in there, and I will pick the lock, or break it, if I cannot do any better?”

Oh! if in the soul there was the same diligence; if you came up to a virtue and said, "I know it is in here, and it shall come out; I will try this key, and that, and I will not be baffled; and I will bring in this one, and that one, and the other one, to help me; and if there is no other way I will play burglar—for it has got to come out;" your success in right living would be certain. Did you ever see a drawer that did not come open when you went to it with such determination?

But suppose you had sat down before your bureau, and said, "*Do* come out drawer—*please* come out!" You would have acted as Christians do when they stand before virtues and graces, and say, "I wish I was humble." No, you do not wish you were humble either! "I wish I could get over my self-indulgence. I sometimes think I will." Is that the way the man talks who is pursuing a Christian life? Is that the meaning of "Strive (agonize) to enter in"?

If there is anything in this world that is worth having, it is a nobler virtue than you have now; it is liberty in the better part of your soul; it is dominion over those things which are sensuous, wicked, devilish, in your nature. And if you sought for these things as you seek for hid treasure, or for treasure that is lost, you would be sure to obtain them.

A man has lost a title-deed, or some paper that would decide a suit in his favor, rather than against him. And with what alacrity does he search for it! How does he go through the house in quest of it! "My dear, have you seen that roll of paper with a great red seal on it?" "What was it? A newspaper?" "No, *no!* not a newspaper. I shall lose a suit if I cannot find it." And she searches in every drawer, and every trunk, and every closet, and even under the carpets. Both of them search night and day, going over the same places twenty times, saying, "Maybe I did not look thoroughly." And they cannot give it up. They wonder what on earth has become of that paper. "Those servants are always doing some mischief—is it possible that they have carried it off?" The man almost cries, he wants it so much. He *will* have it, so much depends upon it. And at last he finds it, and he says, "I would rather have had my house burned, than not to have found this paper."

Now, when men search for victorious virtues in their souls, as they would search for an important legal document, do you suppose they will be saying, "Perhaps others may be able to live a good Christian life, but I cannot"? You *can*. And when you want true religion; when your soul hungers for it, you will find it. When you cry out for God, he will cry out for you. There was never a heart homesick for heaven, that heaven was not homesick for it. Never did a soul long for God, that God did not long for that soul. And there is not one

thing that you need—not one single victory over wrong; not one single virtue; not one single triumph of a better desire over a baser one—that if you put into it faith, Christ does not say to you, “If you have as much as a grain of mustard-seed, you shall pluck out the worst thing, and cast it into the sea.”

Oh, blessed promise! oh, sweet revelation of truth! oh, divine and ever-to-be-adored declaration of mercy! that there is stored in every one that victorious power by which we are able to subdue the enemy that is in us, and put down the animal, and rise into the spiritual, and become worthy to be called the children of God.

Have you tried this, Christian brethren? Abandon all half-way measures, and try it heartily, earnestly, thoroughly. Speak to your children, and comfort them, and show them the way to these victories. Speak to those who are just beginning a Christian life, and encourage them to persevere.

I know it is hard to turn a life that is misdirected into right channels; I know it is hard to change wrong feeling to right feeling; but it can be done. And the victory will pay for the struggle. Not those victories which come easiest are most sweet to us.

When through the battle, through the night and its watches, through marches over stream and through morass, and through loss upon loss, Sherman at last saw glimmering the spires of the far off city on the Gulf, do you not think all the toil and labor of the great way was repaid by that one single first sight? The march and the battle were behind him. The hardship was over, and the victory was in his hand.

When we draw near to that other and better city whose bright domes flash God's eternal light, and over whose battlements come sweet voices to us to-day, saying, “Come—come,” one single look, one waft of its perfume, one echo of its joy, will repay us for every tear, for every sorrow, and for every discouragement.

Then gird up your loins, dear brethren. Take a new lease of life. Form a higher purpose for the future. Have more courage—not courage which comes from a consciousness of your own strength, but that courage which comes from the certainty that “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Oh, children of the living God, my Father's children, my brothers and sisters, heirs with me to an eternal inheritance! let us take hold of hands to-day, with a new covenant, with new sweetness of love and joy, and begin to live for the heavenly land.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We rejoice that we walk in no strange way when we seek thee, our Father. Not so familiar to our footsteps was our father's house on earth as now to our feet is our Father's house in heaven. We have sought thee through storms and through sunshine. We have sought thee through sorrow and through joy. We have sought thee in weakness and in strength. And thou hast never been shut off from us. When thou didst hide thy face, it was only as we sometimes hide our face from our children that they may be the happier in our coming again. Thou hast dealt with us very tenderly. Thy providences have been very gentle. The things which we have mourned we have not understood; and that which seemed as rudeness to us was no rudeness but mercy. For thou dost work by light and by darkness alike. Joys and sorrows are both the elements of love and mercy in thine hand. Thou dost mingle affairs so as to work out in us a noble manhood. It is not to bless us now but to bless us forever, that thou art working in us. It is not to make us happy but to make us so good that we cannot but be happy. And thou art preparing for to-morrow by sacrificing to-day. Thou art eternally working the best things for the best ends. Thou art rearing us out of the animal kingdom, and bringing us through manhood into the sonship of God, and preparing to exalt us into the spiritual realm, and to make us worthy of crowns and of sceptres and of thrones and of liberty and dominion forever and forever. Rebuke in us, therefore, O thou beneficent Father, all vulgarity, all groveling dispositions, all pride, all self-indulgence. We confess that we sin by selfishness, and by every evil passion. We confess that we are continually prone to revert to earth, and to find our joy in things sensuous. We confess that every single day we disturb the harmony and purity of our souls. Every single day we need thee, both for patience, and for strength, and for forgiveness, and for cleansing, and for inspiration, yea, and for hope. We are most bold in audacity at times, and thrust ourselves into great trouble; and then straightway we repent, and are utterly discouraged and desponding, and are disposed to cast away our hope, and to cease every endeavor for a better life. We need thee, O Lord, on both sides—above us and beneath us, before us and behind us, to be all to us—to be all in all.

We rejoice that thou art, and hast been, gentle and loving; and that thou hast taken thy very titles from the universality and continuance of thy gentleness and love. And we pray that we may be, by the mercy of God, led to repentance, and by the gentleness of Christ persuaded to a nobler life.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt grant this morning, the ministration of thy mercy, adapted to the special wants of each one in thy presence—to the wants of the young, and to the wants of the old; to the wants of those who are in the midst of vehement struggles, and to the wants of those who are outcast, and who require divine help; to the wants of all that are in danger of self-indulgence. Grant that the consciousness of the sinfulness of their hearts may keep none from the confidence of thy love this morning. May every one have the sweet assurance that God is interested in him, and that God loves him, and that God is drawing him, and is overcoming sin in him, and healing the desire of sin in him. And may every one be disposed to come back to the best Friend that even sin has in the soul. Grant that every one may remember that for him, while yet an enemy, thou didst give thy Son, and that Jesus died. And we pray that there may be hope, not to presume in sin, but to assail the mightiest sin, and to break it by the power which God shall give to us.

Grant, we pray thee, that those who are in responsibility for others, ruling over them in the household, or in any of the avocations of life, may be like thee. May they be to those that are under them, what thou art to them—as generous; as gentle; as forbearing; as patient; as disinterestedly seeking their welfare.

We beseech of thee that we may be diligent in business, and yet fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; doing with our might what our hands find to do; remembering that the night cometh when no man can work, and that what we do we must do presently.

We beseech of thee, that thou wilt grant that those who are young, and are entering upon life, may enter with a more resolute and virtuous manhood than those who have

preceded them. May there be none who shall enter upon life as upon a playground, to seek there their own amusement and enjoyment. May every one remember his calling. May every one put high before him the great enterprises and duties of life. May all gird up their loins; and, because they are young and strong, may they go forward in the service and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt bless all those who are in darkness—for there are many upon whom thy hand has rested heavily. Comfort their sorrows. Grant that bereavements may not betray their confidence in thee. The more they suffer, the nearer may they press to the all-sympathizing heart of God. Draw near to any that are friendless and in perplexity; to any that are overmatched by their struggles in life; to any that are overmastered by temptation. But thou, O God, art full of mightiness for others as well as for thyself; and thou wilt not suffer them to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear. If they come to thee ingenuously, thou wilt open a door to them of escape. And we commend the tempted to thee, that thou mayest succor them. May they be willing to be succored.

And we pray that thou wilt bless the outcast, the poor, the ignorant, the wanderers—those that do not know better than to live in hatreds, in strifes, in every evil passion. Grant that we may not turn inhumanly away from them, as if they were not of us; as if they did not belong to our households; as if they were not men like ourselves; as if they were not parts of the great family to which we belong. Grant that those who go forth especially to seek them, to preach to them, to relieve them and to succor them, may themselves be filled with the Spirit of the Master. May they have, also, the blessing of God resting upon their fidelity. May none be weary in well-doing. May none turn back from well-doing because they find among the poor and needy ingratitude, intractableness, indocility, and all manner of evil requitings. May they, too, bear men's sins and carry their sorrows, as Christ bore our sins and carried our sorrows. And so may they learn to follow Christ through good report, and through evil report, and exalt the conception of a Christian manhood in the eyes of men.

We pray, O Lord, that thou wilt fill thy people more and more with the fruits of righteousness. Make them more lovely. Grant that men may behold in them the evidences of true religion.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt bless, not ourselves alone, but all the Churches that are gathered to-day of every name. Strengthen all that are called to speak the truth, and enable them to speak it in love. And may all that listen receive seed into good and honest hearts. Grant that the blessing of God may go forth with all the preachers that, throughout this great land to-day, are lifting up their voices and bearing testimony of the truth.

Grant that all schools, and all colleges, and all labors for civilization, may have thy blessing.

Pour out thy Spirit upon the nations of the earth. If they have heard thee calling in the heavens, and are rising up and blindly following, send thou guides for them. May knowledge prepare the way.

O Lord, wilt thou fulfill the promises which respect the whole world. Bring down the high hills, and lift up the valleys. Make the rough places smooth, and the crooked places straight. And grant that all the earth may see thy salvation. Which we ask for Christ Jesus sake. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt bless the word which we have spoken, and make it a living word to every needing heart. Give power to thy servants to preach it. Give more power to thy people to live according to thy truth. Bless us while we sing once more; and go home with us; and at last bring us home to thee. Which we ask for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

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